UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.3/1993/11
8 December 1992

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

STATISTICAL COMMISSION
Twenty-seventh session
22 February-3 March 1993
Item 8 of the provisional agenda*

PRICE STATISTICS

Report on developments in the International Comparison Programme (ICP) and other related international comparison issues

Report of the Secretary-General

SUMMARY

The present report begins by reviewing both the publication of the final results of the phase V global comparison (paras. 3-5) and the completion of the 1990 European Comparison Programme (paras. 7-11).

A separate section summarizes the status and progress of each regional comparison (paras. 13-19), while a further section reviews progress on the phase VI global comparison (paras. 20-27). Next the methodological aspects of the programme are considered, in particular the core commodity approach, which provides the linkage between regional comparisons (paras. 30-33). There follows an overview of how the integration of ICP work into national statistical programmes could be promoted (para. 36). Finally, organizational and financial issues are described, with special emphasis on the coordination of operations at the country, regional and global levels (paras. 39-51).

The report ends with points for discussion by the Commission (para. 52).

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INTRODUCTION

1. At its twenty-sixth session, in 1991, the Statistical Commission requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Commission, at its twenty-seventh session, a progress report on developments in phase VI of the International Comparison Programme (ICP) and other related international comparison issues. 1/ The present report has been prepared in response to that request.

I. PUBLICATION OF THE PHASE V ICP RESULTS

2. Since the twenty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission one more regional comparison, comprising seven Caribbean countries, has been completed in the framework of phase V of the International Comparison Programme (ICP), with 1985 as reference year. Published results for 1985 are now available for all six individually conducted regional comparisons.

3. The European Community (EC) issued a report on the 1985 comparison conducted by the Statistical Office of the European Communities (EUROSTAT) for its 12 member countries. 2/ A separate report covers the results for the 22 countries which participated in the 1985 comparison conducted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). 3/ Results of the European comparison for 1985, covering the 17 European OECD countries plus three Eastern European countries, were published by the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE). 4/ Results of the 1985 African comparison, covering 22 African countries and conducted by EUROSTAT, were also published. 5/ The results of the comparison for 1985, conducted among 10 Asian countries plus Japan by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), were published by the ESCAP Secretariat in 1992. 6/ A report with results of the 1985 Caribbean comparison, conducted by EUROSTAT, was also made available in 1991. 7/

4. Arrangements have been made to publish a global report based on the linking of the regional comparisons carried out in phase V. The processing of the world results, covering 63 countries with reference year 1985 has been undertaken by EUROSTAT. This processing has generated world results for 53 categories of final expenditure on gross domestic product (GDP). Naturally the processing of the global comparison could not start until the last of the regional comparisons was completed. Unfortunately, unexpected methodological difficulties delayed the production of the world comparison because of the small number of intraregional core comparisons available for linking the regions. In addition, the processing of the 1985 global results was further delayed due to other commitments of EUROSTAT in the last months of 1991 and early 1992. The tables with the numerical results of the 1985 global comparison were received in June 1992.

5. The Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat has engaged a consultant to prepare the draft of the 1985 global report. In accordance with

the outline drawn up by the Statistical Division, the report will review and summarize the findings of each regional comparison, present the global results and provide information on the methodology used in producing the world tables, along with indications for users on the limitations of the global results. The final tables having been received, the final preparation of the global report, which will be a joint publication of the United Nations and EUROSTAT, has been rescheduled for 1992.

6. Work on the first draft of the information brochure on ICP has started with the assembly of materials for inclusion in the brochure. The brochure will allow a wide range of prospective users to familiarize themselves with the nature and coverage of the International Comparison Programme and will disseminate information on the availability and uses of ICP results at the national and international levels. The publication of the brochure is scheduled to follow the publication of the global report on the phase V results.

II. PROGRESS IN THE PHASE VI REGIONAL COMPARISONS

A. Comparisons with reference year 1990

7. Three country groups, OECD, EUROSTAT and Group II (Eastern Europe), have conducted comparisons with reference year 1990. The OECD-EUROSTAT joint programme was finalized by the end of 1991, whereas Group II work is still in progress.

8. In the framework of OECD and EC, the 1990 comparison has been completed successfully. All 24 OECD countries and 12 Community countries were covered for the first time. Results for 1990 were discussed at a joint meeting in Paris in November 1991. After a final review of the data, the overall results were included in the volumes of national accounts publications at the end of 1991. 8/ 9/ Detailed results have started to be released through specific methodological publications. 10/ The 1990 comparison, covering five Nordic countries (four of which - Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden - were coordinated by OECD and the fifth - Denmark - by EUROSTAT), has been completed, and the relevant publication was issued in April 1992. 11/ A bilateral Canada-United States of America comparison for 1990 is under way and publication of results is scheduled for the fourth quarter of 1992. Data collection in the EUROSTAT-OECD comparisons has been spread over a three-year cycle and the purchasing power parity (PPP) comparison is now carried out continuously: instead of the traditional five-year benchmark approach, EUROSTAT obtains comparison results annually, while OECD does so every three years.

9. In Eastern Europe, six countries (Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, the former USSR and Yugoslavia) have joined ICP Group II in the 1990 round. Both Czechoslovakia and the former USSR were first-time participants in the programme, in need of particular methodological support. In collaboration with the national statistical offices of Germany and Hungary,

bilateral exercises were carried out on an experimental basis to facilitate the participation of the former USSR. Moreover, valuable technical assistance was provided by experts from the Austrian Central Statistical Office (ACSO), the World Bank and OECD during their subsequent visits to the Moscow-based State Statistical Commission. The changes that came into effect in the former USSR in 1991 and in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia in 1992 did not affect the status and data coverage of the 1990 Group II comparison. However, a number of the transition economies are facing increasing difficulties caused by the changes in their statistical systems and aggravated by the cutbacks in their budgets, which have often affected their activities within ICP unfavourably and increased the burden on ACSO, the centre of that regional comparison.

10. In accordance with arrangements in the previous phases, countries in Group II are engaged in bilateral comparisons with Austria. In 1991 ACSO hosted a consultative meeting to cover organizational and methodological issues. 12/ Participation of experts from transition economies at the consultative meeting was supported by the World Bank. In the 1990 round basic price data for over 1,000 items were collected from each country. All price data have been reported to ACSO, which calculated a preliminary version of detailed binary price ratios and discussed them at bilateral meetings with the countries in 1991 and 1992, mostly in line with the timetable adopted at the Vienna consultation. Because some expenditure data were still missing, processing could not be finished before September 1992. Group II countries will meet in Vienna to review preliminary results in November 1992.

11. Under the European Comparison Programme (ECP), data originating from OECD, EUROSTAT and Group II comparisons will be combined to yield final results covering 25 European countries for reference year 1990. ECP results can be expected by the end of 1992 at the earliest. The main numerical results will be reported to the Conference of European Statisticians at the plenary session and a full report on the 1990 European comparison will be published later in 1993.

12. In the developing regions, due mainly to the lack of sufficient financial support, a relatively late start of the implementation of phase VI regional comparisons did not permit the comparisons to be conducted for 1990. Consequently, the phase VI global comparison will have a later reference year.

B. Comparisons with reference year 1993

13. Since there was no participation from Asia, Africa and Latin America in ICP-related comparisons with benchmark year 1990, much consideration went into the selection of the next possible year when most regions would be likely to conduct comparisons. After consultations with all international agencies concerned, each region finally agreed to designate 1993 as reference year of its forthcoming benchmark comparison in phase VI. The proposal to establish 1993 as the common year for price and expenditure data collection in various regions was endorsed at the twenty-fifth session of the Subcommittee on Statistical Activities of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC), held in Vienna in June 1991 (see ACC/1991/PG/10, para. 74).

14. The year 1993 coincides with the reference year of the forthcoming joint EUROSTAT-OECD comparison. Although EUROSTAT will continue making annual calculations during this round, 1993 will be the next benchmark year of the OECD PPP programme. Data collection is already under way and responsibilities for data collection have been divided between the two secretariats. EUROSTAT coordinates the 12 Community countries plus Austria, Finland, Sweden and Switzerland, while OECD coordinates the remaining two Nordic OECD countries, Turkey and the five non-European OECD countries. OECD is also responsible for the linkage between the two data sets. The EUROSTAT and OECD comparisons will be conducted along lines similar to those of the previous round. EUROSTAT is examining the possibility of having Poland participate in its programme on an experimental basis, as part of the preparations for the future multilateralization of the Eastern European comparison.

15. A number of countries in Eastern Europe, with Austria as a centre, committed themselves to conduct a comparison for 1993. Countries which had previously participated are expected to continue cooperation and Bulgaria expressed intentions to join Group II. However, recent events in Eastern Europe may bring changes in the country composition of Group II, since some newly independent States have already shown interest in the programme, while others may do so in response to a recent inquiry by the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat. The forthcoming consultative meeting of Group II countries in Vienna (November 1992) will discuss, among other issues, the preparatory work of the 1993 comparison. It is expected that preparations for the 1993 data collection will begin immediately after the current 1990 round is completed. In view of the rapidly changing market circumstances in the transition economies, substantial changes in the Group II regional list of specifications can be expected. Three organizations, OECD, EUROSTAT and ACSO, have made arrangements to hold a series of workshops for Eastern European countries in order to facilitate their eventual participation in ECP on a multilateral basis.

16. In the ESCAP region seven additional countries, Bhutan, China, Fiji, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Singapore and Viet Nam, have joined ICP, bringing the number of countries participating in the 1993 comparison to 18 (including Japan). China is participating on a limited basis only and will conduct two bilateral comparisons, one between Shanghai and Japan and another between Guangdong and Hong Kong. ESCAP countries have agreed to shift the comparison's base year (which was originally set for 1992) to 1993 in adjustment to the schedule of the global comparison. Preparatory work has already started; it has included bilateral visits of country experts between June and August 1992 and a workshop in Beijing in September 1992 to discuss and finalize item specifications. The participation of country experts at the bilateral meetings and the workshop is financially supported by the Asian Development Bank. The Government of Japan has provided ESCAP with a full-time adviser on price statistics on a non-reimbursable basis, to assist countries in the relevant areas of work. The adviser entered on duty in July 1992. Prior to that, a staff member of the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat had provided technical advisory services at some of the bilateral consultative meetings held in June 1992 in China, Fiji, Singapore and Viet Nam.

17. With regard to the ECLAC comparison, 16 countries had previously expressed interest in taking part in the next round of ICP. In spite of their expressed interest, however, the participation of most countries in the region is subject to external financing possibilities. ECLAC and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) have been discussing a regional project to strengthen the statistical infrastructure of countries with respect to price statistics activities. It is likely that the project will go forward on a pilot basis for selected countries to establish the mechanisms which will allow them to participate in the ICP. In the meantime, ECLAC has been reviewing and studying background technical materials to be used should the IDB project be executed, or should alternative interim funding become available to keep preparatory work going. In terms of methodological support, ECLAC may also count on help offered by the Instituto Nacional de Estadistica (INE) of Spain.

18. As regards the next African comparison, an agreement has been reached that EC will finance the 1993 round. Administrative procedures to finalize this agreement started in the second quarter of 1992. EUROSTAT had previously sent letters to the African countries that participated in phase V to ascertain whether they would be willing to participate again. Positive replies from all 22 countries strengthened the conviction of EUROSTAT that it would be useful to undertake the new round. In the meantime EuroCost, a consulting firm of EUROSTAT, has made considerable progress in preparing the necessary technical documents, including portable software, which will allow substantive work to begin promptly once the funds are made available, making the prospect for a timely African comparison promising.

19. Although individual national statistical offices in the ESCWA region, such as that of Saudi Arabia, have occasionally inquired about the requirements concerning participation in ICP-type comparisons, there has been no formal expression of interest in or support for an ESCWA regional comparison in phase VI of ICP.

III. PROGRESS IN THE PHASE VI GLOBAL COMPARISON

20. At its twenty-fifth session the Statistical Commission endorsed the continuation of the programme, at least at the regional level, and, as a world comparison, only if resources permitted and if it could be carried out in such a way as to ensure the statistical soundness of the comparison. 13/. At the twenty-sixth session a wide range of national statistical offices and international organizations expressed interest in having global comparison results. 14/

21. Pursuant to the request made at the twenty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission, the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat has continued making arrangements to implement the phase VI global comparison. At the time of the request the prospect of conducting new benchmark comparisons in a number of regions seemed highly uncertain, as did the prospect of reaching a consensus on the selection of a common reference year. However, since the twenty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission,

in February 1991, the Statistical Division, in cooperation with other international organizations, has endeavoured to secure and expedite the implementation of phase VI in developing regions. This has required the coordination of considerable efforts by the groups of countries themselves, the international organizations associated with them and prospective sponsors, in order to provide methodologically sound regional comparisons on a timely basis. Since ICP is built up of individual regional comparisons that are at the same time components of the global comparison, ensuring country participation in regionally undertaken and globally coordinated comparisons was essential to the purposes of the global comparison in phase VI.

22. Because most regions have supported the initiative to conduct comparisons in 1993, the programme has gradually acquired a firmer foundation. As a result of consultations with international agencies involved in ICP work, the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat has proposed that 1993 should be the reference year for the global comparison in phase VI. This proposal was endorsed by the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities at its meeting in 1991. Thereafter, the Statistical Division was able to focus work on ensuring the required degree of consistency among regional comparisons, a necessary precondition for generating a reliable, useful and timely world comparison for 1993.

23. A central expenditure classification for use in phase VI of ICP was prepared by the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat in April 1991 and revised later in 1991 in the light of the comments received on it. The breakdown of GDP expenditures into categories, known as the list of basic headings, with a detailed description of the coverage of the categories, was designed to promote harmonization between the lists of various regional comparisons in phase VI.

24. In response to the request by the Statistical Commission for the publication of technical documents connected with ICP methodology, the preparation of the Handbook of the International Comparison Programme 15/ was given priority to contribute to the spreading of the technical knowledge needed at the national level by staff responsible for work on ICP, especially in developing and newly participating countries. This is the first attempt in the 25-year history of ICP to publish a handbook that includes practical instructions on how participating countries can achieve a successful application of the general methods.

25. In preparing the Handbook, the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat received valuable assistance from a variety of sources. The conceptual framework and initial outline of the Handbook were elaborated by Hugo Krijnse-Locker and Laszlo Drechsler, the late outstanding ICP experts. Acting as a consultant to the Secretariat, Mr. Drechsler prepared major portions of the first draft of the Handbook, which were supplemented by the work of Michael Ward of the World Bank. Alan Heston of the University of Pennsylvania, with financial support from the World Bank, assisted the Secretariat by preparing a revised version of the full text of the Handbook. This draft text was widely circulated for comments and Professor Heston, working closely with the Statistical Division, incorporated into the draft the

various comments received. In its present form the Handbook reflects, to the extent possible, the various useful suggestions forwarded to the Statistical Division during the several rounds of consultations with experts. In this regard, the substantial contributions of national and international agencies, such as the World Bank, OECD, the Austrian Central Statistical Office, and the Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques (INSEE) of France, deserve particular mention. However, it is not possible to list all the individuals and institutions which pooled their expertise to assist the Statistical Division in completing this task.

26. In order to provide technical support for ongoing activities in the current phase of ICP at the country and regional levels, an advance issue of the Handbook was released in the first quarter of 1992, prior to its formal publication in all official languages in the second half of 1992.

27. With inputs received from other ICP-related international agencies, the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat completed the list of core items with detailed specifications to be used for linking regional results in phase VI. This activity is further described in paragraphs 30 to 33 below.

IV. METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

28. The procedure for producing regional results, the methods used for aggregation in ICP comparisons, remain unchanged in phase VI. As earlier expert group meetings concluded, there is no single aggregation method which satisfies all the requirements of comparisons between countries, and parallel methods may be used in the various regional comparisons as long as they remain consistent with general ICP requirements.

29. It is widely recognized that uniform application of classifications, concepts and definitions, as well as coordinated methodology, are needed to ensure that all regional and bilateral comparisons are compatible with each other, if they are to be linked in a global comparison. Furthermore, special arrangements are needed to establish methodologically firm links between regional comparisons.

30. Following the request made at the last session of the Statistical Commission, the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat continued to develop a core commodity list consisting of items that overlap on the specification lists of at least two regions. By early 1992, the selection of core items had been carried out and a proposal for the draft "List of core items with detailed specifications", covering a total of 488 items, was made available to experts for comments in April and July 1992. Comments by the invited experts on the core specifications list started arriving in September 1992 and the Statistical Division has begun to revise the core list.

31. A core item (commodity, service or occupation) is a fully specified item that is available and can thus be priced by most countries in all regions of

the world. The selection of core specifications has been made on the basis of specification lists used in past rounds of ICP-related comparisons in various regions (seven altogether). After careful and thorough matching, the items constituting the common set from the regional lists were determined and the majority were designated as core items. The inclusion of an item in the core list was based on the assumption that the incidence of an item in various regional lists would allow countries from those regions to price the given item. Core items will serve as a basis for common price observations across the regional or group comparisons and permit linking between each grouping of ICP countries. For convenience, items in the core list are organized according to basic headings applied in the central ICP classification.

32. In phase VI countries will be asked to price as many of the items that are common to all regions as possible, preferably a minimum of one core item for each basic heading, as well as to price items exclusive to their own regions. As a result, prices will be collected for a sufficiently large number of identically specified goods and services available in countries that participate in otherwise independently conducted regional exercises. An important advantage of the core commodity approach is that it makes use of all of the available price information to establish links between the regions. In other words the averaging procedure for obtaining price parities is designed to allow for the fact that every item is not priced in every country.

33. A further advantage of the core commodity approach is that these links are not influenced by the choice of countries to be used as interregional links. Although there are some instances of double participation in ICP, as in the case of Austria and Japan, which participate simultaneously in two regional comparisons, this practice remains more the exception than the rule. While double participation constitutes a natural link between regional results, there are not enough countries willing to volunteer as bridges between all pairs of regions, given the workload associated with such a commitment. Moreover, from a strict methodological point of view double participation in itself may be insufficient to produce a strong link, since the structural characteristics of the designated bridge country may differ from those of other economies in both regions.

34. An important objective of methodological development in phase VI is to improve the quality of basic data in general and the comparability and representativeness of specifications in particular. One major deficiency of some regional specification lists used in previous phases was that many items were not representative for developing countries. This happened because some of the lists were initially put together on the basis of the ones that had been prepared for industrialized countries and these were only slightly modified to serve other regions. Although countries in developing regions were encouraged to add their own representative items, this was not done as frequently and consistently as had been expected.

35. The basic principles in selecting representative items are comparability and representativeness. Comparability requires that identical products be selected, whereas representativeness requires that the selected specification

should be typical of a country's market. It is widely known that there is a certain trade-off between these requirements and it is not always possible to satisfy both equally. Although the ICP Handbook gives instructions about price collection, experts nevertheless face difficulties when trying to accommodate variations in quality. The treatment of quality differences deserves special attention in phase VI; Group II countries, which use quality adjustments extensively, have suggested that this issue be dealt with at forthcoming meetings of ICP experts.

36. In phase VI much attention is devoted to fostering the use of procedures and practices that will gradually make ICP a part of countries' routine work in national accounts and prices. To achieve this goal, the first step is to determine what the countries routinely collect and what additional work may be necessary for them to participate in ICP. To accomplish this, it will be necessary in the long run to conduct a full-scale survey of items and specifications already included in the consumer price index and other indices of countries and also the coverage of household budget surveys or other means of establishing expenditure weights. In the immediate future, monitoring the compilation of regional specification lists and the related multilateral and bilateral consultations may provide an excellent opportunity for gathering information to start a limited number of case studies on country practices.

37. At the time of writing, many chapters of the revised System of National Accounts (SNA) have been completed, although the new version of the SNA will not be before the Statistical Commission for formal adoption until March 1993. It is already known that in a number of instances, the revised SNA concepts have come closer to the ICP practice (e.g., the introduction of the concept of actual consumption), while in other cases, the recommendations of the new SNA will affect ICP (e.g., the extension of the concept of capital formation to include some non-material products). As an international programme, ICP will naturally want to follow the relevant recommendations of the new SNA. However, since the implementation of phase VI is already under way, while the new SNA, especially in developing countries, may not be implemented immediately, for practical reasons, the methodology of ICP in respect of the SNA concepts will remain unchanged in the current phase.

38. In 1991 and 1992 experts from EuroCost, together with the World Bank, have undertaken a project to develop ICP-relevant software for use on microcomputers to enable countries and regional processing centres to do their own processing and analysis. With this kind of computer software, countries will be able to compile and report basic data for ICP more in accord with requirements, integrate ICP data with related national data to serve their own statistical needs, and analyse ICP data and results for their own policy purposes, which will make ICP data collection more appealing and relevant to their needs. The World Bank is working closely with EuroCost in order to make the software applicable not only in Africa, as originally intended, but in all regions.

V. ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES

39. In line with previous decisions of the Statistical Commission, phase VI of ICP, like the two preceding phases, will be based on regional comparisons. About 80 countries in all have expressed their willingness to participate in one or another of the regional comparisons, although in some cases (e.g. ECLAC, Group II) only a tentative list of participating countries has been drawn up so far. Arrangements have been made to start the regional comparisons. However, not all of these comparisons seem equally secure for the 1993 round of ICP. As described in paragraphs 23-27 above, many methodological preconditions for linking regional data into a global comparison have already been met, and the remaining issues are in the process of elaboration. However, the prospect for a meaningful world comparison in phase VI will depend mainly on whether difficulties in funding some regional comparisons can be resolved satisfactorily. The uncertainties about the phase VI world comparison are closely related to organizational and funding problems existing at the regional level: many institutions that coordinate regional ICP activities lack sufficient resources to carry out their responsibilities in a smooth and timely manner. This situation is aggravated by the demand from a number of countries in the programme for outside assistance and funding, since they consider that without such support they will be unable to accomplish their tasks in the ICP exercise. Pending the successful completion of a sufficient number of regional comparisons, their data will be combined to arrive at the world comparison. At the twenty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission, EUROSTAT indicated that it was prepared to assume responsibility for processing the phase VI global results, as it had done in phase V. 16/ Accordingly, the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat has arranged to share with EUROSTAT the tasks related to generating global results for 1993. However, if the Statistical Commission at its present session considers that the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat should undertake the global data processing duties for future phases, the Statistical Division is prepared to assume this responsibility provided sufficient resources are available for this purpose.

40. Although ICP has always been a cooperative undertaking, work is now more widely shared than it was in earlier phases. Participating countries still focus their work on price collection and on providing expenditure data, which together constitute the basic information required. A more recent development is the broader role of the United Nations regional commissions in using their close links to the countries to organize the regional comparisons.

41. The ESCAP secretariat is the regional coordinator of the comparison for Asia and the Pacific. Besides the financial support already provided by ADB, the ESCAP secretariat needs and intends to seek support to finance activities designed to review data inputs for phase VI. Actual data collection in the ESCAP region was to start immediately after the workshop in Beijing scheduled for 21-25 September 1992, since the relevant documentation will have been finalized as a result of that workshop. A full-time ICP adviser is providing assistance with technical work and coordination activities. The ESCAP comparison activities will be carried out according to a time schedule that was to be agreed upon at the 1992 Beijing workshop.

42. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) has so far not been involved in the current phase of ICP. EUROSTAT has formally approved the financial agreement for another round of the African comparison and EuroCost will continue to undertake coordination. However, it is felt that the ECA statistics programme would be enhanced if it were involved in the comparison, especially in order to move towards the integration of regular national statistical activities with ICP work. The African Development Bank, on being asked about its interest in contributing to the progress of the African comparison programme, expressed a willingness to cooperate and indicated that it would follow up progress in the programme with ECA and endeavour to secure resources for comparison-related activities in the future. However, in phase VI the African comparison will mainly be conducted by EuroCost along the lines of the previous exercise, probably according to a similar schedule, which has yet to be decided.

43. As for the Latin American comparison, the ECLAC secretariat continues to be involved in preparatory ICP work. Moreover, the pilot regional project to strengthen the statistical infrastructure of countries with respect to price statistics (see para. 17 above) should go a long way towards improving their ability to respond, in a continuing way, to the demands of ICP. While this is a project which is initially of limited scope, other countries of the region may still wish to consider participation in a wider effort if sufficient additional financing can be found for the current round of ICP. Should it become evident that additional financing will not be available to allow a significant number of countries to collect price data in 1993, or for a short time after the reference year until mid-1994, the special circumstances of the region would make it very difficult to provide reliable inputs for the current round of ICP. However, this would be an unfortunate event in the context of the current global comparison.

44. In Eastern Europe, because of the special problems arising from the transitional status of the economies of the region, countries face a more complex situation than ever before in reporting data for ICP. The joint efforts of the main organizers, ECE and ACSO, are supported by such organizations as the World Bank, OECD and EUROSTAT, which furnish advice and other kinds of assistance to Group II countries. At the consultation in Vienna in October 1991, the countries discussed a proposal by OECD to multilateralize Group II comparisons. Participants welcomed the proposal, but it was felt that it was not appropriate for their countries to adopt a multilateral approach right away. Nevertheless, there was strong support for a gradual implementation of the proposal. As a result, in December 1992, three organizations, OECD, EUROSTAT and ACSO will organize the first of a series of workshops for a wide circle of Eastern European countries, including successor States of the former USSR, and more seminars will follow in 1993. The organizational arrangements for the next Group II comparison in 1993 will be on the agenda of the consultative meeting scheduled for November 1992.

45. Although regionalization is the basic approach followed by the programme, the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat remains the world centre of ICP and is responsible for promoting overall coordination of the

programme and organizing the global comparisons. In phase VI it will continue to assist developing countries, to the extent possible, in the application of ICP methodology and will support regional comparisons when the regions take the initiative to undertake such activity. Technical support has already been provided through the preparation and dissemination of substantive technical documents, and similar activity is envisaged throughout the execution of phase VI. Such technical documents as the ICP Handbook, the central ICP classification and the list of core items, all prepared by the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat, constitute the basic documentation to be used in the phase VI global comparison, and could be considered as something like a "start-up kit" for newcomers in the programme. However, these documents will necessarily be complemented by other sources of information on the application of ICP methods that the regional organizers will be expected to provide. Thus, region-specific questionnaires, worksheets and various kinds of technical instructions will be supplied by the regional coordinating agencies. Although no uniform survey materials will be distributed centrally, the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat will promote the distribution of instructions and survey materials at the regional level that will facilitate the standardized collection of basic data. To this end the Statistical Division will serve as a centre for the exchange of technical information, including materials prepared in a different region or documents used in previous phases, and it will issue guidelines and work closely with the regional organizers to promote the harmonization and coordination of technical materials to be used in all regional comparisons.

46. Pending the finalization of timetables for the regional comparisons as listed under paragraphs 41-44 above, a number of organizational issues and the timing of the 1993 global comparison cannot be discussed in more detail until after the forthcoming meeting on ICP (see paras. 49-50 below). These issues will therefore be covered in the report containing updated information on the work of the Statistical Division (E/CN.3/1993/24).

47. In performing its coordination function for the global comparison, the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat is itself facing difficulties. Budget constraints are seriously restricting the missions the staff concerned can undertake to assist data-collection activity in developing countries. Such activity is of necessity limited to a few of the countries with special problems - for example, those with little or no experience in the ICP exercise. Insufficient travel funds for participating actively in the regional coordination work, or attending regional or international meetings, make it difficult to ensure that common approaches are used in all regional comparisons and may thus affect the quality of the basic data collected and the uniform understanding of ICP principles. Lack of funds may also obstruct the Statistical Division in its endeavour to play a more active role in promoting the harmonization of ICP work with consumer price index and national accounting statistics programmes at the country level.

48. To accomplish the objectives of phase VI, the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat is promoting outside support from the national and international agencies concerned to meet needs at the regional and country level in order to:

(a) Assist regional organizers in holding regional workshops to train national statisticians in ICP methods and practices and to discuss unresolved methodological issues, and in funding travel by developing country experts to these meetings;

(b) Assist in placing consultants on a short term basis or for extended periods, to provide technical support for activities at selected regional commissions;

(c) Assist in channelling support to developing countries concerned to improve their statistical capabilities and interested in doing special price surveys and national accounts data collection for ICP purposes.

49. A series of informal consultations on work on phase VI have been held between the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat and the World Bank, as well as other organizations involved or expected to be involved, and many aspects of the ICP have been discussed. At its twenty-sixth session, held in Geneva in April 1992, the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities urged that the Statistical Division convene a meeting to consider both the technical and financial matters that were of concern (see ACC/1992/16, para. 35). It was noted that the success of such a meeting would in large part depend on the participation of appropriate technical and policy staff of the organizations involved. In the meantime, the Statistical Division started preparatory consultations with the organizations concerned to convene an expert group meeting to review the status of methodological work on some technical questions, including the core commodity approach.

50. Arrangements have been made for the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat, in collaboration with the University of Pennsylvania and the World Bank to call a meeting of experts working on ICP world wide to discuss several aspects of the implementation of phase VI, which will lead to an action plan for conducting the 1993 global comparison. The meeting is tentatively scheduled for 30 November-2 December 1992. The Statistical Division considers that the composition of the meeting will provide an opportunity for taking up the issues of a technical and organizational nature suggested by the Subcommittee. Items on the preliminary agenda of the meeting cover a broad range of issues, both methodological issues, such as the core commodity approach and its implementation, and issues related to the organizational side of the comparison work. Issues for discussion will include the strategy for integrating ICP work into national accounting and price statistics programmes at the country level, a proposal for an action plan on the implementation of the 1993 global comparison, based on timetables adopted for the comparisons in all regions, and a coordinated publication and dissemination policy for ICP results at the regional and global levels.

51. The prospect for a satisfactory global comparison for 1993 is still promising, provided that all international and regional organizations concerned work closely together and mobilize resources, for this common cause in terms of both expertise and financial funds. The continuation of the ICP

as a world programme depends very much on whether phase VI produces a new set of benchmark statistics that keep user interest alive and encourage countries to participate.

VI. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

52. The Commission may wish to comment on:

(a) Final results obtained in the phase V global comparison;

(b) Overall progress with respect to phase VI of the ICP at the regional and global levels, including the issuing of methodological documents;

(c) The extent to which the preconditions for the next comparison with reference year 1993 have been met in all regions and the kind of assistance needed to overcome difficulties;

(d) Methodological issues involved in phase VI of the ICP, with special attention to the applicability of the core commodity approach for obtaining global results;

(e) A strategy for promoting the harmonization of ICP operations with national statistical work on national accounts and prices;

(f) Methods of strengthening the coordination of ICP methods and operations, and improving the quality of phase VI regional comparisons, given the financial limitations of the United Nations Secretariat and the number of participating countries;

(g) Priorities for further work on ICP by the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat in phase VI.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1991, Supplement No. 5 (E/1991/25), para. 87 (i).

2/ Statistical Office of the European Communities, Purchasing Power Parities and Gross Domestic Product in Real Terms Results, 1985 (Luxembourg, 1988).

3/ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Purchasing Power Parities and Real Expenditures, 1985 (Paris, 1987).

4/ United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, International Comparison of Gross Domestic Product in Europe: 1985, Statistical Standards and Studies, No. 41 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.88.II.E.28).

Notes (continued)

5/ Statistical Office of the European Communities, Comparison of Price Levels and Economic Aggregates, 1985: The Results for 22 African Countries (Luxembourg, 1989).

6/ Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Purchasing Power Parity and Quantity Comparison for the ESCAP Region, 1985 (ST/ESCAP/1128).

7/ Statistical Office of the European Communities, Comparison of Price Levels and Economic Aggregates, 1985: The Results of Seven Caribbean Countries (Luxembourg, 1991).

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9/ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, National Accounts (1960-1990), Volume 1, Main Aggregates, Purchasing Power Parities Supplement (Paris, 1992).

10/ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Purchasing Power Parities and Real Expenditure, EKS Results 1990, Vol. I (Paris, 1992).

11/ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Purchasing Power Parities and Real Expenditures for Nordic Countries, 1990 (Paris, 1992).

12/ Note by the Secretariat on item 3.4 of the provisional agenda of the fortieth plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES/715).

13/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1989, Supplement No. 3 (E/1989/21), para. 117 (a).

14/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1991, Supplement No. 5 (E/1991/25), para. 82.

15/ Handbook of the International Comparison Programme (Forthcoming publication of the United Nations).

16/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1991, Supplement No. 5 (E/1991/25), para. 81.

UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.3/1993/12
4 December 1992

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

STATISTICAL COMMISSION
Twenty-seventh session
22 February-3 March 1993
Item 9 of the provisional agenda*

DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIAL STATISTICS: POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUSES; CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS; STATISTICS ON SPECIAL POPULATION GROUPS; AND STATISTICS ON THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

Report on demographic and social statistics, including statistics on the advancement of women

Report of the Secretary-General

SUMMARY

The present report provides an overview of the 1990 World Population and Housing Census Programme carried out by countries and areas of the world. It also briefly sets out the common issues emerging from national experiences with a view to considering necessary substantive preparations by the United Nations Secretariat for the 2000 round of population and housing censuses (paras. 6-16).

This report presents progress in the implementation of the International Programme for Accelerating the Improvement of Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems, including the highlights of the workshop held in Buenos Aires in December 1991 (paras. 17-28). It also presents work on the development both of statistics on special population groups including children, the elderly and persons with disabilities and of related databases to meet efficiently the needs of users and programmes (paras. 29-38). Activities for the development of statistics on the advancement of women are reviewed in sect. IV (paras. 39-56), including compilation and dissemination, development of statistical concepts and methods, and coordination.

Points for discussion by the Statistical Commission are covered (para. 57).

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INTRODUCTION

1. The present report, submitted in response to requests made by the Statistical Commission at its twenty-sixth session, 1/ deals with demographic and social statistics, including those related to the advancement of women. In particular, it includes information on the progress achieved in the 1990 World Population and Housing Census Programme, in the implementation of the International Programme for Accelerating the Improvement of Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems and related methodological work, on the development of statistics on special population groups and databases, and on the development of statistics on the advancement of women. Furthermore, this report contains a discussion of issues that are emerging in the 1990 round of population and housing censuses and of advance substantive preparations that may be undertaken by the United Nations Secretariat to assist countries in the next round of population and housing censuses, as well as of the preparation of statistics for the 1995 World Conference on Women.

I. POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUSES

A. Progress in the 1990 World Population and Housing Census Programme

2. Pursuant to the recommendation of the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1985/8, 2/ in the 1990 census round, 194 out of 232 countries or areas had, as of 1 April 1992, already carried out or planned to have a population and/or housing census during the period 1985-1994. This leaves 38 countries or areas for which no information about their census plans is available and/or no census is planned. The breakdown of countries or areas by continent is shown in the table. In certain countries, census preparations had actually been made but for various reasons the census was postponed to a date after 1994 or cancelled. In some, population registers and administrative records systems were used to provide census-type data on population and housing.

3. Furthermore, 29 countries or areas took more than one census. Thus, a total of 225 censuses have been conducted so far in the 1990 round. Some important achievements in this round include an overall improvement in many phases of census-taking particularly in regard to data processing, owing to the widespread adoption of new technology by developing countries.

4. Among the developing countries, the 1990 census decade has witnessed a wide use of microcomputers particularly in the processing of data. In the 1980 round, microcomputers were used by a few countries with small populations. In the present decade, these small but powerful machines have proven capable of handling the processing of very large censuses. Moreover, microcomputers have enabled the decentralization of data entry and processing. They have also facilitated the tabulation of local area population characteristics and the timely use of such data. Many countries have exploited this technology extensively for the purpose of carrying out

Countries or areas having taken or planning to take a census, and census type, 1985-1994, by continent or region (as of 1 April 1992)

Continent or region	Total number of countries or areas	Countries or areas			Census type			Total number of censuses taken
		Planning no census	Having taken or planning to take at least one census	Having taken or planning to take at least two censuses	Population and housing	Population only	Housing only	
Africa	56	11	45	2	36	10	1	47
Asia	50	8	42	9	41	9	3	53 a/
Europe	43	9	34	5	36	3	0	39
North America	37	4	33	1	32	2	0	34
Oceania	32	5	27	11	33	5	0	38
South America	14	1	13	1	14	0	0	14
Total world wide	232	38	194	29	192	29	4	225 a/

a/ Including two countries each of which having taken, or planning to take, more than two censuses.

data processing and other census activities. As a result, it is anticipated that the time-lag between the census enumeration and the release of census results will be shorter in the 1990 round as compared with the previous rounds.

5. In the 1990 round, there has also been a striking increase in the number of housing censuses carried out by countries mostly in conjunction with population censuses. As shown in the table, 192 countries or areas have conducted or will conduct a population and housing census in the 1990 round, representing an increase of 20 countries or areas over the 1980 round. However, it appears that the results of housing censuses are sometimes only partially processed and utilized.

B. Emerging issues and needs for the 2000 World Population and Housing Census Programme

6. Despite the overall progress in the 1990 round, a number of issues were faced by countries in the course of carrying out their population and housing censuses. The issues differed among countries depending on the national census institution and the capability that had been built over the past census decades, political developments, public support and cooperation and, finally, resources. Notwithstanding, some issues were common to a large number of developing countries and can be expected to arise in the next round of censuses. They therefore need to be carefully considered with a view to consolidating present achievements and contributing to further efficiency and effectiveness in future censuses and surveys. To this end, experience of both developed and developing countries with well-established census capabilities can provide valuable lessons if shared globally and regionally.

7. In reviewing the experience of the current round of population and housing censuses, several issues emerge as particularly important in planning the 2000 round of population and housing censuses, particularly from the perspective of developing countries. The issues in the pre-census phase include (a) a late start and lack of adequate preparations, caused particularly by time constraints, in the areas of census cartography, publicity and training and (b) a high turnover of census staff which in turn has accentuated the problems of national and subnational census offices.

8. With respect to census content, the basic topics recommended by the United Nations in Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses (ST/ESA/STAT/SER.M/67) 3/ and in Supplementary Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses (ST/ESA/STAT/SER.M/67/Add.1) 4/ as well were widely covered by countries in the 1990 census round, ensuring greater use and comparability of census results at both the national and the international level. However, an emerging issue relating to census content is that of the strategy of data collection to be used. The study of national practices in the 1990 census round showed that in many countries two different kinds of questionnaires were utilized, namely a long and a short census form. The short census form included basic questions only, applicable to the entire population; the long

census form included a wide range of specific questions on various census topics designed to meet the requirements of users and applicable to a sample of the population. In a number of instances, the issue that arose centred on the choice of topics and/or the size of the sample to be used for the long form. National practices differed and international guidance would be useful in addressing these issues.

9. In the phase of data processing and data utilization, countries (especially the developed countries) found that they had to develop a wider range of census products and ones that were based on a larger variety of media (computer tape, diskettes and compact disk read only memory (CD-ROM), among others) responding better to users' specific needs. This demand is expected to continue and intensify in the 2000 round of censuses; the issue, therefore, before many census offices in all parts of the world will be how to meet, and readily adapt their census products and services to, changing user needs. In this regard, an issue that may be expected to become serious in the context of the 2000 round is the likely competition from private vendors who have purchased access to census statistics. Such vendors would be in a better position to meet quickly the specific needs of users and in so doing could well deprive census organizations of a source of income. These new census products also raise issues related to the confidentiality of industrial census responses.

10. In the light of the above-mentioned issues emerging from the 1990 round, a number of needs may already be identified in connection with preparations for the 2000 round of population and housing censuses. The list does not exhaust all needs and some additional issues may emerge before the present census decade comes to an end in 1994, particularly in the areas of evaluation and utilization of census data, courses of activity upon which many countries are now embarking. The post-enumeration surveys (PES) for census evaluation are fast becoming a standard practice in countries. However, further methodological studies and guidance on their organization and conduct are needed. Moreover, the use of PES results in censuses requires exchange of national practices and views in the context of future census planning.

11. The foremost need among countries is a continuous programme of cartographic activities covering the pre- and post-enumeration phases of censuses as part of the programme for intercensal data-collection activities in population and other areas, as well as for the next round of population and housing censuses. Some countries that were interested in utilizing the Geographic Information System (GIS) in the 1990 round could not introduce it for various reasons including time constraints. Work in this area, which is designed to assist countries, would be valuable for the 2000 round of censuses.

12. Furthermore, studies to develop improved methodology including questionnaire design, and data-capture procedures including the use of the Optical Mark Reader (OMR) application in developing countries, would be useful in the context of the 2000 round of censuses. The use of OMR or Optical Character Reader (OCR) technology has greatly facilitated data processing in censuses. However, the high cost associated with the requirements,

particularly those of high-quality paper and precision in printing of questionnaires, inhibits many developing countries from adopting this kind of technology. This issue will emerge in the context of the 2000 round and therefore assessment of data-processing technologies for potential use and appropriateness in the light of census requirements and technological environments of the developing countries would assist in planning the 2000 round of censuses.

13. Moreover, emerging user needs at the required geographical level and in respect of census topics require further attention so that use of sampling appropriate to the contents of the long forms can be increasingly adopted.

14. The use of long and short forms, which was widespread in the 1990 round, is expected to gain further momentum in the 2000 round as a means of reducing census cost and improving quality. Comparative studies of country experiences including specific problems encountered would therefore be useful to countries.

15. The problem of staff turnover and shortage was particularly serious in countries that proceeded each decade to put together an ad hoc organization for carrying out a population and housing census. The need for a permanent organization that could be drawn from the 1990 staff cannot be overemphasized in the context of future censuses. Moreover, the census interval of 10 years is a long period considering the demand for socio-economic data in modern times; therefore an intercensal survey that in a sense would also serve as a sound basis for preparation of the decennial census is needed in most countries.

16. As noted in paragraph 5, the 1990 round witnessed a significant increase in the number of population and housing censuses by countries, reflecting the importance of housing and related data for purposes of human settlements policies and programmes. The United Nations recommendations on housing censuses date back to the 1970s and developments since, with respect particularly to housing topics and tabulations, need a detailed review by an expert group with a view to validating and/or proposing any necessary modifications for adoption by countries in the 2000 round.

II. PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING THE INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR ACCELERATING THE IMPROVEMENT OF VITAL STATISTICS AND CIVIL REGISTRATION SYSTEMS

A. Workshops on civil registration and vital statistics systems and related methodological work

17. At its twenty-sixth session, the Statistical Commission endorsed the International Programme for Accelerating the Improvement of Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems which had been developed jointly by the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics (IIVRS). To

coordinate and implement effectively this Programme, a Coordinating Committee for the International Programme, consisting of staff from its principal sponsor organizations, was formally established in May 1991.

18. Furthermore, the Commission welcomed the suggestion to conduct workshops in Latin America and Africa as part of the International Programme and expressed its appreciation to the Government of Argentina for offering to host one of the workshops. Accordingly, after intensive preparations, the Latin American Workshop on Strategies for Accelerating the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems was held in Buenos Aires from 2 to 6 December 1991. The National Institute of Statistics and Censuses of Argentina, on behalf of the Government of Argentina, made excellent arrangements for carrying out the Workshop, including the appointment of a local organization committee to assist the United Nations in all preparatory work and implementation of the workshop.

19. Eleven Spanish- or Portuguese-speaking countries of Central and South America in which the figure for birth and/or death registration was 80 per cent or above were invited to participate in the workshop and included Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Uruguay and Venezuela. These countries were viewed as having high potential for rapid improvement of their national systems.

20. The two documents indicated below, prepared by the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat as part of the International Programme, were sent to countries together with the invitation for preparation of the country reports according to a standard outline:

(a) "A guide for a review and assessment of the civil registration and vital statistics systems";

(b) "Guidelines to prepare a national report on the civil registration and vital statistics systems".

21. The Workshop was attended by a total of 87 participants: 26 official delegates from the 11 Latin American countries and Denmark and Norway; 18 official observers (15 from Argentina and 3 from Brazil); 4 members of the local organizing committee and 30 additional observers from Argentina. In addition, 9 representatives attended the workshop from the following organizations: the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Latin American Demographic Centre, the Inter-American Statistical Training Center, the International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics, the Pan American Health Organization/WHO, the Inter-American Children's Institute and the United Nations. The Workshop was conducted in Spanish and English.

22. The close involvement of the national statistical offices of 11 participating countries was sought seven months before the workshop. The advance active involvement of countries, both in the selection of country representatives and the timely preparation of reports, contributed

significantly to the achievement of the workshop goals. Those goals involved, inter alia, the assessment of the adequacy of national registration and vital statistics processes, coverage, quality and reliability; ways of promoting awareness of national registration and vital statistics systems; the role of civil registration and vital statistics systems in each participating country in connection with various uses and applications; and various approaches to solving the problems present in the national systems and expediting their improvement in the short, medium and long terms.

23. In all, 13 detailed comprehensive national reports on the current status of the civil registration and vital statistics systems were presented to the Workshop. The Workshop made suggestions regarding the main components of a national master plan for improvement of the systems and emphasized the need for such a plan (on which participants agreed to work further as a follow-up activity to the Workshop). The Workshop emphasized the need for strong and steady commitment by countries, as well as reliance on their own resources in implementing reforms of nationwide scope.

24. In this connection, the Workshop recommended that linkage of the output of the civil registration and vital statistics systems be carried out with respect to one or two main uses that were of vital interest. For instance, it was suggested that cooperation and collaboration be strengthened with:

(a) Specific ongoing health programmes, inter alia, on infant, child and maternal mortality and family planning, for which the output of the civil registration and vital statistics systems could be a primary source of information in connection with monitoring their impact;

(b) Population identification services to protect against forgery and counterfeiting of such important documents as have a direct impact on crime prevention and public security, accuracy of electoral rolls, pension funds claims and so on.

25. An important development at the Workshop was the creation of a Committee of Registrar Generals in Latin America to promote and expedite the development of civil registration and vital statistics in the region. Furthermore, following the Workshop, Argentina set in motion a number of activities to streamline its federative systems of civil registration and vital statistics systems entirely with national resources.

26. In the area of methodology, a study was undertaken on national procedures in over 100 countries or areas for recording vital events on a daily basis and reporting them subsequently to the agency or agencies that compiled continuous vital statistics. The study, which was a supplement to the Handbook of Vital Statistics Systems and Methods, volumes I and II, 5/ dealt with issues of layout and content, numbering, filing, storage, retrieval and preservation of records for civil registration and vital statistics purposes. (The first volume of the Handbook was recently published; the second volume was published in 1985.) Advantages and disadvantages of different vital records and their scope were examined to assist countries in decision-making and reform of their present systems.

B. National efforts towards upgrading vital statistics and civil registration systems

27. At the national level, a number of feasibility studies have been conducted, with funds provided by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), to assess the present status of civil registration and vital statistics systems and identify needs, in order to bring those systems to a level of coverage that is almost complete and able to yield timely data. Improved vital statistics data, particularly on live births and child deaths, will enable Governments and other organizations to monitor under-five and infant mortality rates, and maternal mortality rates. The countries involved include Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico and the Philippines. Subject to the availability of extrabudgetary resources, similar feasibility studies may be conducted in selected countries in the future. The five feasibility studies are planned for publication and wide distribution to countries. In addition, two workshops are planned (one in Africa and another in Asia), as part of the International Programme, to improve civil registration and vital statistics systems. The International Programme includes plans for technical studies on data processing and computerization of vital statistics and civil registration systems including procedures for storage and retrieval of vital records in the future.

28. Work also includes the provision of substantive support to technical cooperation projects funded by the United Nations Population Fund that have been devoted to strengthening civil registration and vital statistics systems in the following countries: Benin, Botswana, the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Jordan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mauritania, Morocco, Myanmar, the Niger, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.

III. STATISTICS ON SPECIAL POPULATION GROUPS AND DATABASES

29. Work on special population groups focused on children, persons with disabilities and elderly persons and involved, inter alia, (a) development of concepts, definitions and classifications; (b) data-collection strategies and international database development; (c) training manuals and handbooks; and (d) technical cooperation including training workshops and advisory services.

30. In 1991, an Interregional Workshop on Developmental Delay and Disability among Children Living in Especially Difficult Circumstances was held in Bangkok, Thailand, from 9 to 13 September 1992. This international workshop was conducted by the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Government of Thailand. Special attention was given to survey methods for the study of developmental delay and disability among children living in special circumstances, for example, in emergency areas, marginal settlements and on the street.

31. With respect to people with disabilities, the International Disability Statistics Database (DISTAT, version 2) is being prepared for dissemination in 1993. DISTAT contains national disability statistics from censuses, household surveys and administrative registries, and presents data on 12 major socio-economic and demographic topics concerning disability. DISTAT, version 2 will include data provided by countries in response to the Demographic Yearbook Special Questionnaire on Ageing.

32. A technical manual on methods of collecting and analysing disability statistics is under preparation. This manual will provide case-studies of national survey experience in disability data collection. A review of national approaches for disability data collection in population censuses and administrative records will also be presented.

33. An International Workshop on Development and Dissemination of Statistics on Persons with Disabilities, organized by the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat and Statistics Canada, was held in Ottawa, Canada, from 13 to 16 October 1992. The Workshop was to be conducted in English and French. It was intended to provide a forum for discussion of national work and to consider the need for international recommendations on disability statistics. The Workshop also considered the concerns of producers of disability statistics, including survey directors and data users in both government offices and research centres, regarding the need for comparability and quality of disability data.

34. Furthermore, an Expert Group Meeting on Disability Statistics is being planned by the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat in collaboration with a national statistical office for 1993, subject to extrabudgetary sources of funding. The purpose of the Expert Group Meeting will be to review national experience and to prepare international guidelines needed for improved methods of collection, international comparability and effectiveness of disability statistics. The Expert Group will also review the above-mentioned manual, which will later be published taking into account the comments of the Expert Group and other materials presented.

35. The Demographic Yearbook Database, developed prior to the advent of microcomputers, currently exists on the mainframe computer and is essentially a producer's database. Data were hitherto provided on an ad hoc basis to private users and national offices, as well as to others in the international system, on computer tapes. In recent years, as microcomputers have become more widespread, the demand for demographic data on personal computer (PC) diskette has increased. In order to meet these needs, a three-year project, with financial support from UNFPA, is under way to strengthen the existing database. Upon completion, the database will contain demographic and social statistics time-series starting from 1950 and will permit their rapid retrieval and efficient use for international population research, including studies of special population groups.

36. In addition, to facilitate the reporting of demographic statistics for use in the Demographic Yearbook in an efficient manner, national statistical

offices have frequently requested that they be given the option of providing data in diskettes instead of filling out paper questionnaires. Work has therefore begun so that countries in the future can provide data either in paper questionnaires or on diskettes.

37. The first output from the new database under development will include a special issue of the Demographic Yearbook on population ageing and the situation of elderly persons. It is currently in preparation and will present statistical tables giving 40-year trends in population ageing with respect, inter alia, to marital status, family and living arrangements, changes in mortality, fertility, economic activity and disability among the elderly.

38. Work is also in progress on a companion database comprising principally statistics from housing censuses and related socio-economic data. Pursuant to the decision of the Statistical Commission at its twenty-sixth session, the Human Settlements Questionnaire was sent to countries in February 1992. The Questionnaire was designed on the basis of expert group recommendations and reviewed in detail by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and the regional commissions. It covers data on population from the Demographic Yearbook Database, housing infrastructure, land use and a few other topics. Data are requested at the country level, for urban/rural areas and for the four largest cities as well. In order to facilitate data entry and to improve quality of data, a microcomputer application was prepared. Each country received a paper questionnaire and a diskette together with instructions for electronic data entry. The final product is to be a Housing and Human Settlements Statistics Database that aims to serve, among other users, the Global Report on Human Settlements prepared by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) at the request of the Economic and Social Council.

IV. STATISTICS ON THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

39. Improvement of statistics and statistical methods concerning women was established as an important component of the Statistical Division's work programme in 1979, in response to recommendations of the World Conference of the International Women's Year (1975), 6/ the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2061 (LXII) and the Statistical Commission at its twentieth session. 7/ Those recommendations have been further elaborated by the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace (1980), 8/ the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace (1985) 9/ and, most recently, the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1989/106, the Commission on the Status of Women in its resolution 36/4 on the integration of elderly women into development 10/ and its resolutions 35/4 11/ and 36/8 12/ on preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in its general recommendation No. 17 (tenth session, 1991) 13/ and the General Assembly in its resolutions 46/98 and 46/167.

40. This legislative concern reflects the increase in demand for gender statistics over the past 15 years arising from national and international programming related to women's concerns, including international events and strategies, and the growing interest and use of those statistics by advocates of policies for the advancement of women and by the media and the public.

41. The work programme of the Statistical Division in this field comprises four types of activity: compilation and dissemination, methodology, technical cooperation and coordination. Technical cooperation activities are discussed in a separate report before the Statistical Commission, except for several aspects particularly relevant to coordination issues, discussed in subsection C below.

A. Compilation and dissemination of statistics and statistical databases on women

42. The objectives of this area of work have been to develop and implement coordinated, integrated dissemination output for statistics and indicators on the situation of women, and to compile and coordinate available data in that output, making those data easy to use and widely available to a wide range of users. In the period 1991-1992, work has concentrated on preparation and dissemination of version 2 of the Women's Indicators and Statistics Database (WISTAT) and the United Nations publication The World's Women, 1970-1990: Trends and Statistics, 14/ which was published in 1991.

43. WISTAT provides a comprehensive set of internationally available gender-based statistics in a single, comprehensive and well-documented source. It was established with UNFPA support, using international statistical sources and without imposing any new burden on national statistical offices. Since its release it has become the pre-eminent consolidated international source and authority for statistics on women. WISTAT covers 178 countries and areas of the world and the full range of national statistics on women that are available at the international level. Version 2 of WISTAT was issued on microcomputer diskettes in 1991 and the WISTAT users guide is in press. 15/ WISTAT has also been used to prepare a number of different outputs, appropriate to the needs of various users. The most ambitious and successful of these is The World's Women, 1970-1990: Trends and Statistics.

44. The World's Women is an experimental publication that uses innovative techniques and formats to highlight the findings on women's conditions world wide and to present statistics and analyses that are readily accessible to a wide group of users. The book has become the most successful research publication ever issued by the United Nations Secretariat. Evidence of this includes sales in the first year in English amounting to 14,000 copies, plus 2,500 free distribution; quotation in the world media; translation of the book into Italian, Japanese, and Turkish (in addition to translation into the official languages of United Nations bodies, namely Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish); and citation in the work of the Third Committee, the

Economic and Social Council and the Commission on the Status of Women among other bodies.

45. The World's Women reflects an unprecedented degree of inter-Secretariat and inter-agency collaboration in its preparation, promotion and use. Specifically, there was strong user-producer interaction among the organizations collaborating in its preparation - the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat and the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Office at Vienna, UNICEF, UNFPA and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

46. Collaboration is expected to be even more extensive and significant in the development of the second edition of The World's Women, which the Statistical Division will again be responsible for overseeing. The following sponsoring organizations have been identified to date for the new publication: the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNIFEM, UNICEF, UNFPA and, within the United Nations Secretariat, the Division for the Advancement of Women, the Department of Public Information and the Publishing Division. Other active technical collaborators include the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), UNESCO and WHO. A technical meeting on preparations for the second issue of The World's Women was held in New York from 15 to 18 June 1992. The meeting was primarily concerned with consideration of substantive improvements that can be made in the second edition, with particular emphasis on recommending ways of improving country coverage. To this end the group recommended greater inter-agency collaboration with the specialized agencies of the United Nations system and the regional commissions working with the Statistical Division to provide supplementary data and estimates.

47. Ongoing work in the development of WISTAT continues to be done in close complementarity with preparation of the next edition of The World's Women. Overall, that work seeks to improve the comprehensiveness and up-to-date status of the data and specifically includes extension of the technical and substantive coverage of WISTAT through the development of new series and topics based on experience gained through the use of WISTAT, the updating of the series and the filling in of gaps, and the development of new database methods for wider dissemination and easier use.

48. Plans for the Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held in 1995, have given a key role to further work on gender statistics at the national level in assembling gender-disaggregated statistics for the elaboration of national reports on the situation of women and at the international level through preparation of an updated version of The World's Women, 1970-1990: Trends and Statistics as an official document for the Conference.

B. Development of improved concepts and methods for statistics on women

49. The general objectives of this programme have been to effect long-term improvements in statistical concepts, methods and data-collection programmes needed to provide a more complete and objective picture of the situation of women and of equality between the sexes. In cooperation with the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), it has made considerable progress towards achieving objectives established in the three global conferences on women for the purpose of improving the coverage of women's activities and concerns in economic statistics of the labour force, national accounts and the informal sector, as discussed by the Statistical Commission at its twenty-fifth session.

50. Following up the methodology worked out in Methods of Measuring Women's Participation and Production in the Informal Sector (ST/ESA/STAT/SER.F/46), 16/ and in subsequent work in Africa sponsored by UNDP in cooperation with the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and INSTRAW as noted in a report of the Statistical Division to the Statistical Commission at its twenty-sixth session publications have been prepared on (a) appropriate data tabulation programmes for use in established population censuses and household surveys to highlight women's role in economic activity, (b) methods for establishing accounts of women's contribution to economic activity as adjuncts to the System of National Accounts (SNA), and (c) a compendium of statistics and case-studies of statistics on the informal sector. 17/ The Statistical Division has also continued to cooperate with INSTRAW and the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on National Accounts to ensure that methodological issues affecting the equitable measurement of women's work in SNA are taken into account in the SNA revision. Extensive results of this work are summarized in chapter 6 of The World's Women, 1970-1990: Trends and Statistics, entitled "Women's work and the economy". As a follow-up to its work on SNA, INSTRAW has initiated a project proposal concerned with the potential of time-use studies and the valuation of women's unremunerated work. The proposal has been submitted to relevant bodies including the Statistical Division, FAO and ILO to elicit substantive comments and establish terms of collaboration.

C. Coordination

51. As gender statistics must cover a very wide range of subject areas, the programme has relied very heavily on a coordinated approach to implement its objectives in compilation, development of statistical methods and technical cooperation.

52. The smooth and efficient functioning of data-sharing arrangements among international statistical services has been ensured by the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) Subcommittee on Statistical Activities. Because of these arrangements, international data compilation and development of databases on women by the Statistical Division have been accomplished with

no additional reporting burden on countries. The Statistical Division worked closely in providing and developing these data with the international organization units most directly concerned with women's issues: the Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations Office at Vienna, INSTRAW, UNIFEM, UNFPA, as well as units of other organizations such as the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and FAO. These organizations were then able to channel their major efforts and limited resources into development of new and innovative statistics and methodology rather than duplicate the compilation of existing data and burden countries with additional requests for statistical information. The deliberations and support of the Commission on the Status of Women and the Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Group on Women have also been instrumental to the success of this coordination approach.

53. The framework for the integration of social and demographic statistics (FSDS), established through the coordinated efforts of international statistical services and the Statistical Commission in the late 1970s, has successfully provided the essential conceptual framework within which the specific concerns relating to gender statistics and indicators have been developed.

54. The two most important and successful examples of the output of the programme, the women's statistics database and The World's Women, both reflect the logical, innovative extensions of intensive coordination in data compilation, the former constituting an integrated, readily available, comprehensive and easy-to-use database for microcomputers and the latter demonstrating the great interest of international agencies in, and their commitment to, making statistics available and understandable for policy, programme and advocacy purposes.

55. The commitment to coordination of the Statistical Division has also fostered new initiatives in technical cooperation in gender statistics. Gender statistics issues have been wholly integrated into the development of technical cooperation projects of the National Household Survey Capability Programme (NHSCP) and UNIFEM in, among other countries, Bangladesh, China and Pakistan, with the promotion of essential feedback between country developments and practices and development of methods at the international level.

56. This type of innovative feedback has been especially useful in three areas: development of statistics and methods to measure economic activity in censuses and surveys, 18/ development of statistics and methods to measure women's participation in the informal sector, and assistance to countries in development of national databases and statistical reports on the situation of women. In the informal sector, a major cooperative project comprising a whole range of innovative technical cooperation activities was successfully implemented in Africa, in close collaboration with INSTRAW and ECA. The dual commitments and responsibilities of the Statistical Division in methodology and technical cooperation, and its close working relation with ECA, ensured the development of coordinated and integrated approaches in this complex

field, covering many countries and specialties. Following the successful development and promotion of WISTAT and The World's Women, the Statistical Division, in cooperation with UNIFEM, several interested bilateral agencies and the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP), is responding to many requests from countries for assistance in developing comparable national databases and reports.

V. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

57. The Statistical Commission may wish to:

(a) Take note of the progress made in the 1990 World Population and Housing Census Programme and its implementation by countries and areas of the world;

(b) Discuss the emerging issues in the Programme and recommend substantive preparations necessary for the 2000 round of population and housing censuses;

(c) Review the achievements thus far of the International Programme for Accelerating the Improvement of Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems and suggest further steps necessary in its implementation;

(d) Comment on the work concerning the improvement of statistics on special population groups including children, the elderly and people with disabilities, and the development of related databases to serve user needs and programmes;

(e) Discuss the collaborative intersectoral arrangements established for integrated development of statistics on the advancement of women and consider ways of strengthening those arrangements, with a view to providing maximum support to national, regional and international preparations for the 1995 World Conference on Women.

Notes

1/ See Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1991, Supplement No. 5 (E/1991/25), paras. 110 and 121.

2/ The adoption of Economic and Social Council resolution 1985/8 was originally recommended to the Council by the Statistical Commission. See Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1985, Supplement No. 6 (E/1985/26), chap. I, sect. A, draft resolution II.

3/ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.80.XVII.8.

4/ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.90.XVII.9.

5/ United Nations publications, Sales Nos. E.91.XVII.5 and E.84.XVII.11.

Notes (continued)

6/ See Report of the World Conference of the International Women's Year, Mexico City, 19 June-2 July 1975 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.76.IV.1), chap. II, sect. A.

7/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1979, Supplement No. 3 (E/1979/23), para. 108.

8/ See Report of the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, Copenhagen, 14 to 30 July 1980 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.80.IV.3 and corrigendum), chap. I, sect. A.

9/ See Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, Nairobi, 15-26 July 1985 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.85.IV.10), chap. I, sect. A.

10/ See Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1992, Supplement No. 4 (E/1992/24), chap. I, sect. C.

11/ Ibid., 1991, Supplement No. 8 (E/1991/28), chap. I, sect. C.

12/ Ibid., 1992, Supplement No. 4 (E/1992/24), chap. I, sect. C.

13/ See Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 38 (A/46/38), chap. I.

14/ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.90.XVII.3.

15/ WISTAT: Women's Indicators and Statistics Spreadsheet Database for Microcomputers (Version 2): Users Guide and Reference Manual (ST/ESA/STAT/SER.K/10) (United Nations publication, forthcoming).

16/ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.90.XVII.16.

17/ Methods of Measuring Women's Economic Activity, Studies in Methods, Series F, No. 59 (United Nations publication, forthcoming), prepared by Carmen McFarlane as consultant to the United Nations Secretariat; Compendium of Statistics on Women in the Informal Sector, Social Statistics and Indicators, Series K, No. 11 (United Nations publication, forthcoming); and "Methods of compilation, valuation and analysis for accounts of women's contribution to economic activity", working paper of the Statistical Division, prepared by L. Urdaneta-Ferran for the Interregional Workshop on the Development of Statistics on Women's Work in the Informal Sector, held in Seoul, Republic of Korea, 25-29 May 1992.

18/ See, for example, Methods of Measuring Women's Economic Activity (United Nations publication, forthcoming).

UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.3/1993/13
5 June 1992

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

STATISTICAL COMMISSION
Twenty-seventh session
22 February-3 March 1993
Item 10 of the provisional agenda*

ENVIRONMENT STATISTICS

Report of the Secretary-General

SUMMARY

The present report reviews ongoing methodological work in environment statistics (para. 2) and describes draft reports on selected topics prepared in the context of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Advancement of Environment Statistics (para. 4). Progress made in environmental accounting, in particular, the "SNA draft handbook of integrated environmental and economic accounting", is addressed (paras. 9-16). Section II (paras. 17-18) describes the coordination of international activities through the Intersecretariat Working Group on Environmental Data. The report reviews progress made in the development and establishment of regional and national programmes of environment statistics (paras. 19-22) in providing support for technical cooperation activities (paras. 25-27). Section V (paras. 28-29) describes the progress made and obstacles encountered in the implementation of the programme of work as approved by the Statistical Commission at its twenty-sixth session. Points for discussion are presented in section VI (para. 30).

* E/CN.3/1993/1.

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INTRODUCTION

1. At its twenty-sixth session, the Statistical Commission stressed the increasing importance of and demand for environment statistics which were needed in support of environmentally sound policies and programmes at national, regional and global levels. The Commission requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report on progress made in the development of environment statistics and the implementation of the proposed programme of work for consideration at its twenty-seventh session. 1/ In accordance with the decision of the Statistical Commission's Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination at its fourteenth session, the present report also describes the work of other international organizations, selected non-governmental organizations and the regional commissions of the United Nations under the respective sections in the text. 2/

I. METHODOLOGICAL WORK

A. Technical reports on environment statistics

2. The Statistical Commission, at its twenty-sixth session, welcomed the preparation of technical reports on the concepts and methods of environment statistics, which it considered a useful framework for the establishment or further development of national programmes of environment statistics. The Statistical Division has published the technical report on Concepts and Methods of Environment Statistics: Statistics of the Natural Environment. 3/ This report, like its companion report on Concepts and Methods of Environment Statistics: Human Settlements Statistics, 4/ has been based on the study A Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics 5/ (FDES). Both reports are intended to promote the application of the environment statistics methodologies in countries with the collaboration of the regional commissions of the United Nations. For example, these methodologies will be presented at a forthcoming expert group meeting and seminar, organized by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) with a view to adapting them to regional needs and priorities. The experience gained from applying these methodologies in countries, together with further methodological work of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Advancement of Environment Statistics (see below), are expected to facilitate the preparation of detailed practical guidelines in selected high-priority areas of environment statistics.

B. Intergovernmental Working Group on the Advancement of Environment Statistics

3. The second meeting of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Advancement of Environment Statistics was sponsored by Statistics Sweden and hosted by the Bureau of Statistics of the United Republic of Tanzania (Arusha, 17-21 February 1992). 6/ It was attended by 5 developed countries 7/ and 13 developing countries, 8/ representatives from the Statistical Division of the

United Nations Secretariat, and observers from several United Nations specialized agencies. The participation of developing countries was facilitated through financial support by Finland, Norway, Sweden, the Overseas Development Administration of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat). The Federal Statistical Office of Germany offered to host the next meeting of the Intergovernmental Working Group in Wiesbaden, Germany, tentatively scheduled for 14-18 December 1992.

4. Regarding the methodological development of environment statistics, the meeting discussed the progress made in the preparation of draft reports on concepts and methods of selected areas of environment statistics. Work on statistics of water use and water quality has continued and a draft report will be presented to the third meeting of the Group. A draft paper on "Energy and air pollution statistics" was discussed and it was decided that it would be presented to the third meeting after further revision and incorporation of comments made by the Intergovernmental Working Group. A note on environment-related agricultural statistics was presented. Two countries agreed to examine the possibility of preparing a joint draft report for the next meeting which would address statistics of land use, including environment-related agricultural statistics. Further areas that could be usefully addressed through cooperative efforts include waste management and hazardous wastes, and environmental accounting.

5. The Working Group requested the Statistical Division to prepare a paper on the linkages between environment statistics and environmental accounting to be presented to the next meeting. With regard to the development of a network of environmental statisticians, the Statistical Division agreed to prepare a preliminary list of environmental statisticians in national statistical offices and international organizations to be circulated to all participants.

6. The development of a glossary of terms of environment statistics was discussed and it was decided that the Working Group and the Statistical Division would explore the possibility of raising funds for the employment of a consultant in these efforts. The Working Group recommended that for the next meeting, participants prepare position papers on the different areas of environment statistics included in the agenda.

7. The Working Group also discussed the request by the Statistical Commission, at its twenty-sixth session, that the Statistical Division carry out a survey and analysis of country practices in the organization and implementation of environment statistics programmes with a view to identifying key environmental indicators. The Group recommended that the Statistical Division prepare a draft questionnaire which would be reviewed at the next meeting. A revised version of this questionnaire will be made available to the Statistical Commission for further comments prior to circulation to selected countries.

8. With regard to the development of environmental indicators, the Statistical Division presented a tentative list of indicators to the Working

Group. It was decided that an improved version of the list would be submitted to the next meeting. The Group agreed that countries would present notes on their need for and experiences in the compilation of environmental indicators to the Statistical Division. The Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development at its fourth substantive session, held in New York from 2 March to 3 April 1992, requested countries and international organizations to develop and use "indicators of sustainable development". Several organizations, inter alia, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the World Resources Institute (WRI) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) are currently developing, or have plans to develop, sets of environmental indicators. The obvious need for coordination in this emerging area of environment statistics will be addressed by the Working Group on the basis of a note prepared by the Statistical Division.

C. Environmental accounting

9. At its twenty-sixth session, the Statistical Commission expressed its appreciation for the progress made in environmental accounting. It requested that the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat focus on the development of integrated environmental and economic accounting, by means of satellite accounts. It also suggested promoting these methodologies through country projects in environmental accounting.

10. The International Association for Research in Income and Wealth (IARIW) organized a special Conference on Environmental Accounting in Baden, Austria (27-29 May 1991). Following this conference, a two-day workshop was held to discuss the "SNA draft handbook of integrated environmental and economic accounting". 9/ The main conclusion of the meetings was that the draft Handbook should reflect, as far as possible, the different concepts and approaches to environmental accounting and attempt to describe the linkages between them. In order to incorporate the various views, it was advised that the Handbook should have a modular structure and permit a step-by-step implementation. A certain degree of consensus was reached in the treatment of natural resource use and depletion while the costing of environmental quality changes was considered to be more difficult.

11. A technical working group consisting of participants in the SNA review process and experts in environmental accounting met at a workshop organized by the Statistical Division and hosted by the Bureau of Economic Analysis, Washington (21-22 November 1991). Since the Handbook as well as the SNA (in a separate section) will deal with the limits between the SNA and the System of Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting (SEEA), the discussion focused on ensuring compatibility in the treatment of natural assets by the SNA and the Handbook. Such compatibility was to be reached by specifying common asset boundaries, classifications of natural assets and other volume changes in non-financial assets and consistent valuation principles. In principle, the SNA and the SEEA should use the same classifications, although a more detailed breakdown could be provided by the SEEA. These issues were

further considered by the Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts in the SNA review process in order to better reflect them in the revised SNA.

12. Based on the above-mentioned meetings, the draft Handbook is now being revised and is expected to be published as an interim version in the SNA Handbook Series later this year. At that time it will be widely circulated to Governments, international organizations and experts in the field to stimulate further discussion and country application. The Handbook has been prepared with the financial support of the Federal Statistical Office of Germany, which provided the services of a consultant at no cost, and the Jessie Smith Noyes and Ford Foundations.

13. The accounting framework of the draft Handbook has been tested in pilot projects in Mexico and Papua New Guinea by the Statistical Division, with the financial and substantive support of the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the national statistical offices and other concerned national agencies in these countries. The report on "Integrated environmental and economic accounting - a case study for Mexico" 10/ has been published. The report for Papua New Guinea will be published after clearance by the World Bank. As part of a World Bank mission to Thailand on sustainable development, an assessment of the feasibility of a country project on integrated environmental and economic accounting was carried out in January 1992. The study, which seems to confirm the feasibility of such accounting, is currently being assessed by national authorities with a view to launching a comprehensive country project. The results of these applications have been incorporated in the draft Handbook and will also contribute to its further expansion, dealing in particular with data collection and processing.

14. UNDP and the Statistical Division jointly organized a Workshop on Natural Resource Accounting and Sustainable Development which was held in San José, Costa Rica (5-7 August 1991). 11/ At this workshop, several countries from Latin America and the Caribbean expressed interest in establishing environment statistics and integrated accounting programmes and requested the sponsors to support such programmes in the region. A similar workshop is planned for the Asia and Pacific region.

15. A Workshop on Environmental and Natural Resource Accounting which was organized by the Committee of International Development Institutions on the Environment (CIDIE), was held at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi from 24-26 February 1992. The interrelationship between physical and monetary accounting was noted and it was stressed that there should be feedback between the development of environmental data and monetary accounting. The meeting endorsed the consolidation by the Statistical Division of the various approaches to environmental accounting in the proposed SEEA. The need for further cooperation between the Statistical Division and UNEP in the fields of environment statistics, monitoring and environmental accounting was emphasized.

16. Integrated accounting has been specifically identified as an important area of work in the draft Agenda 21 for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development to be held in Rio de Janeiro (3-14 June 1992). 12/

At its fourth substantive session, the Preparatory Committee for the Conference recommended in the draft Agenda 21 that integrated environmental and economic accounting be established in all Member States at the earliest possible date as a complement to traditional national accounting. It also requested the Statistical Division to make available and promote the SNA Handbook and support its application in Member States. The recommendations and implications of the Conference for the work programme of the Statistical Division will be included in the report entitled "Updated information on the work of the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat".

II. COORDINATION

17. The Statistical Commission, at its twenty-sixth session, emphasized the need to strengthen the coordinating role of the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat. The Commission considered that the newly formed Intersecretariat Working Group on Environmental Data would focus its work on the coordination of international databases and related data. The first meeting of this Working Group was held at Geneva on 8 April 1991 under the auspices of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and was attended by various United Nations organs and specialized agencies, non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations. 13/ On behalf of the Working Group, the Statistical Office of the European Communities (EUROSTAT) had prepared a draft survey form for compiling information on international environmental databases which was discussed at the meeting. The Intersecretariat Working Group decided that EUROSTAT would circulate an improved version of the database survey form to identify "lead databases" for compilers of environmental data at the international level. The second meeting of the Intersecretariat Working Group was held in Geneva on 21 May 1992.

18. The Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) Subcommittee on Statistical Activities welcomed the participation of a representative of UNEP at its twenty-sixth session and his indication of commitment to cooperation in the area of environment statistics. 14/ In follow-up to the recommendations of the CIDIE meeting (para. 15) first discussions were held between the Statistical Division and the Global Environment Monitoring System (GEMS) of UNEP in order to improve cooperation in the field of environment statistics and monitoring.

III. COMPILATION AND DISSEMINATION OF ENVIRONMENT STATISTICS

19. ECE has completed the third edition of its regional compendium "The Environment in Europe and North-America: Annotated Statistics 1992" which is expected to be issued in June of this year. 15/ This edition is divided into two parts, the first dealing with time series and indicators, and the second has a special focus on agriculture and the environment.

20. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) has prepared an "African compendium of environment statistics", which is expected to be published later this year. The compendium includes environmental data related to, inter alia, population density, land use, area irrigated, agroclimatological conditions, urbanization and natural disasters. 16/ In order to review the progress made by ECA member States in organizing and implementing environment statistics programmes, a rapid inquiry was conducted by the ECA in March 1992. The 10 countries that responded manifested a greatly increased concern for environmental matters. Data collection and compilation on the environment currently takes place mainly in ministries of agriculture, forestry and natural resources and three countries are currently publishing some environmental information. It should, however, be noted that environment statistics is gradually becoming a field of work for central statistical offices and half of the reporting countries mentioned some kind of involvement.

21. ESCAP has launched a project on Development and Improvement of Environment Statistics for the region with the financial support of the Netherlands. Selected countries of the region are expected to participate in an exploratory expert group meeting. The findings of the expert group will then be discussed in a broad-based seminar with a view to establishing a regional programme of environment statistics. The preparation of an operational Handbook, adapting international concepts and methods to the conditions and priorities of the ESCAP region, is envisaged. Already, several countries in the region have environment statistics programmes and publish national environment statistics compendia.

22. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) is currently not in a position to evaluate the state of environment statistics programmes in the region. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) does not yet have an environment statistics programme but believes that this is an important area which needs to be addressed in the near future.

23. The GEMS Monitoring and Assessment Research Centre (London), in cooperation with WRI (Washington, D.C.) and the United Kingdom Department of the Environment (London), published the third edition of the Environmental Data Report (1991/92) 17/ for UNEP. The three editions in the continuing series contain environmental information at regional, national and local levels which illustrates major environmental issues of current concern. WRI, in collaboration with UNEP and UNDP has recently published World Resources 1992-93 18/ which has a special focus on sustainable development, in support of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

24. Comprehensive data compilation and dissemination at the international level is not envisaged by the Statistical Division until an adequate number of regional and national environment statistics programmes have been established. However, to meet the needs of general users of global statistics, the Statistical Division intends to include in the next edition of the Statistical Yearbook, selected series of environmental data from various international sources such as UNEP, the World Health Organization (WHO), or the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

IV. TECHNICAL COOPERATION

25. The Statistical Division presented to the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Advancement of Environment Statistics an overview of activities relating to technical cooperation in the field of environment statistics. Countries were encouraged to cooperate on a bilateral basis as well as to present requests for technical assistance to UNDP and to the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat. The Working Group stressed the need to establish an inventory of training facilities in environment statistics and decided that the Statistical Division would explore the possibility of adding relevant questions on training facilities in its planned survey on country practices (see above, para. 7). The meeting recommended that training workshops and seminars should be carried out under the auspices of the United Nations regional commissions.

26. UNDP is exploring the possibility of sponsoring a seminar for the ESCAP region in Beijing later this year which would be similar to the UNDP-sponsored Workshop on Natural Resource Accounting and Sustainable Development in San José, Costa Rica (para. 14). As part of a recently launched programme of environment statistics, and in cooperation with the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat, ESCAP is planning to convene an expert group meeting on environment statistics in Bangkok towards the end of the year.

27. After the initial phase of a pilot project in integrated environmental and economic accounting in Mexico, technical cooperation has continued between the Statistical Division and the Government of Mexico, with a view to establishing a continuing programme and promoting the use of environmentally adjusted accounting indicators in the country. The possibilities of initiating similar projects are currently being discussed with several countries in Asia and Latin America.

V. PROGRAMME OF WORK

28. At its twenty-sixth session, the Statistical Commission supported "in principle" the expanded work programme on environment statistics of the Statistical Division and requested that future work should focus on the following priority activities:

(1) Coordination of international work

(2) Adaptation of ECE classifications for global use

(3) Survey and analysis of country practices for key indicator compilation

(4) Development of integrated (satellite) accounting and country projects

(5) Initial work on international data collection and dissemination

(6) Establishment of inventories of databases

(7) Support for technical cooperation

29. At the same time the Commission recognized that even this concentration on priority activities would require additional resources. Over the past year it has been possible to achieve a modest increase in resources through redeployment of staff. As a result, and as described above, the major elements of the work programme that have been implemented are the advancement of methodological work in environment statistics and integrated environmental-economic accounting. Progress in the other areas remains relatively slow. Based on the assistance of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Advancement of Environment Statistics and through the recommendations of and mechanisms to be established by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development it is expected that additional progress can be made. The Statistical Division has also proposed to create a new branch on Environment and Energy Statistics in anticipation of the increased demand for environmental statistics and indicators as a result of follow-up to the Conference. The work programme for the balance of 1992-1993 and for 1994-1995 will thus be developed in the light of the recommendations from the Conference which is expected to identify needs and priorities in the areas of environmental statistics and accounting. These recommendations will be described in the report entitled "Updated information on the work of the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat".

VI. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

30. The Statistical Commission may wish to comment on:

(a) The work of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Advancement of Environment Statistics;

(b) Programme of work of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Environmental Data;

(c) International work on indicators for sustainable development and its implications for the Statistical Division;

(d) The work programme of the Statistical Division in the fields of environmental statistics and accounting in light of resource availability and the recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1991, Supplement No. 5 (E/1991/25).

2/ "Report of the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination on its fourteenth session" (E/CN.3/1993/2).

3/ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.91.XVII.18.

4/ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.88.XVII.14.

5/ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.84.XVII.12.

6/ "Intergovernmental Working Group on the Advancement of Environment Statistics: report of the second meeting" (ESA/STAT/AC.51).

7/ Finland, Germany, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.

8/ Brazil, China, Côte d'Ivoire, Ecuador, Egypt, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Mozambique, Pakistan, United Republic of Tanzania, Zimbabwe.

9/ United Nations draft publication (in preparation).

10/ van Tongeren, J., S. Schweinfest (United Nations) and E. Lutz (World Bank); M. G. Luna, F. G. Martin (INEGI, Mexico) (1991). Environment Working Paper No. 50, World Bank, Washington, D.C.

11/ Attended by representatives from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Jamaica, Mexico and other agencies.

12/ A/CONF.151/4 (Part I), paras. 8.41-8.54.

13/ "Intersecretariat Working Group on Environmental Data: report of the first meeting".

14/ "Report of the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities on its twenty-sixth session" (ACC/1992/16).

15/ United Nations draft publication (in preparation).

16/ United Nations draft publication (in preparation).

17/ United Nations Environment Programme, Environmental Data Report (1991/92), 3rd ed. (Oxford, B. Blackwell).

18/ World Resources Institute, World Resources Report 1992-93 (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992).